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Christus Victor

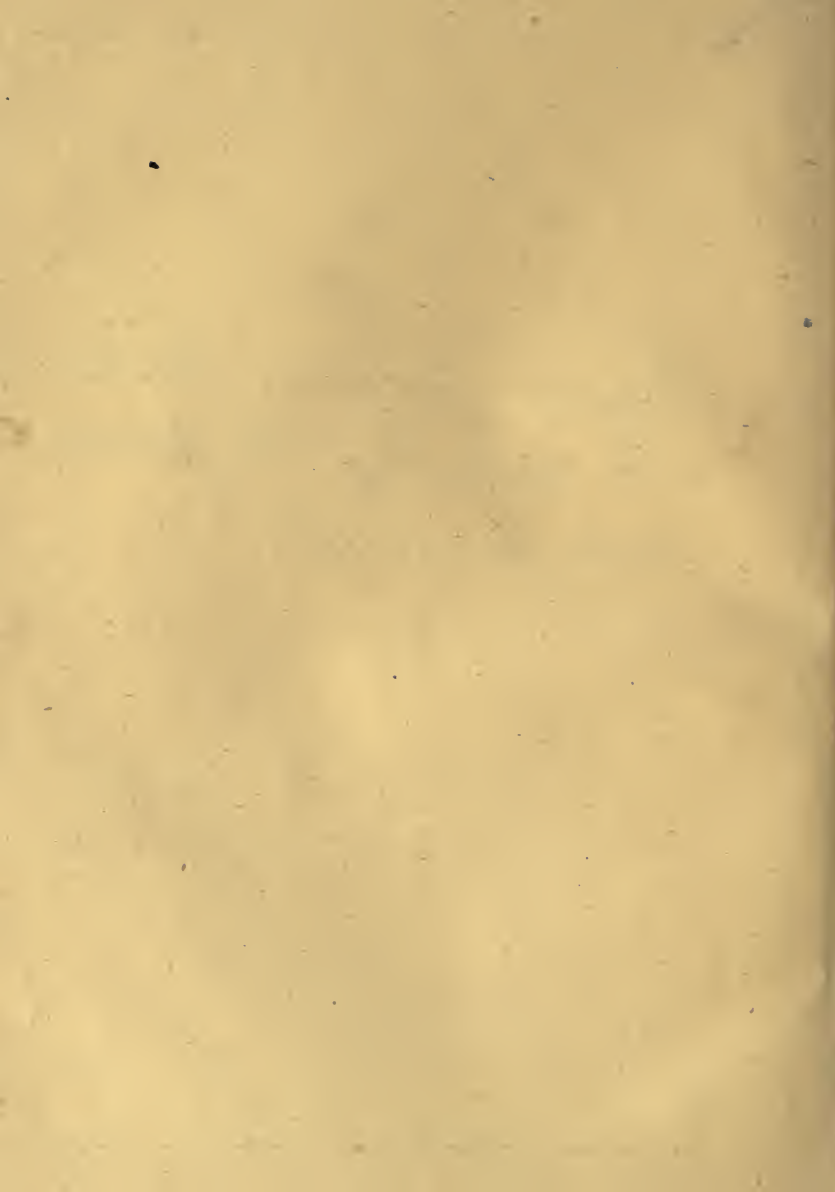


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CHRISTUS VICTOR.



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CHRISTUS VICTOR.



COME, Father Angelo, and sit with me ;
Give me a share of your good company :
I sit apart with books, and guess at life ;
But you are in the thickest of the strife.

You see and know the joys and woes of men,
I dream and write of what I have no ken,
My books are failures, — why, I fain would know,
With what is real and true 'tis never so.

I do not think a line I ever penned,
One broken thread of life would help to mend :
No thought of mine has ever dried a tear ;
No word I uttered ever soothed a fear.

I see a heavy burden borne by one ;
But yet that face glows brightly as the sun :
I see one walk through hells of sin and night,
But not one stain upon those garments white.

I know a life where there was blood and shame, —
No hope to wash the blot from his fair name ;
But yet I see a peace upon his brow,
I cannot fathom whence it comes nor how.

I see all these, and can describe them too,
But there is something hidden from my view :
I see these miracles. How are they done ?
Whence comes the power by which the victory's won.

Father, I sometimes wonder how you bear
To hear so much of guilt and pain and care ;
I fear, beneath their burdens you will sink ;
An early death will be your lot, I think.

My Benediçt, for me you need not fear :
I hear a voice on earth you do not hear ;
'T would break my heart if they should come to me,
And for their griefs should know no remedy.

No matter what the form their sorrows take, —
No matter if their heart be near to break ;
I have a message from their King and mine :
On every wound He pours His oil and wine.

I listen to this beating pulse of Earth,
Throbbing with grief and sin e'en from its birth ;
And through it all a melody I hear, —
Christ's voice, " Be still : fear not, for I am here. "

Now, Benediçt, I will to you disclose
The lives that I have known with all their woes :
With some Christ reigns ; to some He's very near ;
To all He speaks, although they will not hear.

So great His glory, if His feet have pressed
Their threshold only, they are surely blessed :
He knocks, and, though they open not the door,
A ray of sunlight streams across the floor.

Oh, how I love them ! Through thick veils I see
Souls that through Christ saved and redeemed can be :
Sons of the King, though now in rags and shame,
I claim their birthright and the royal name.

First, I will speak of one who now is dead :
But eighteen summers passed o'er that fair head ;
Absence and anxious fears for one most dear
Snapped the frail chords of life which held her here.

The heart and soul were great, and wore away
The flimsy shell, and would no longer stay :
Earth looked a bed of roses in her sight ;
She loved her life, — thanked God it was so bright.

Now who but Christ could help her lay it down,
In all its lustre, with that bridal crown ;
Murmuring not that she must die alone,
Before he came whose heart was all her own ?

She sang this song the day before she died,
Half-dreaming, half-asleep, — I at her side ;
And, though the name of Christ I could not hear,
I felt that He was there, — His spirit near : —

My life is ebbing fast, —
This day perhaps the last
That I shall know :
I see the helmsman pale ;
The breeze doth swell the sail,
And I must go.

I should have been a bride,
But Death is at my side,
 And o'er my head
I see the crown of snow
To bind my virgin brow
 When I am dead.

My love hath been away
For many a long day, —
 Days with no sun :
The earth hath looked so pale,
And joy hath furled her sail,
 Till he should come.

Thou wast the sun to me ;
I faded without thee,
 An early blight :
My heart and my life's key —
I gave them both to thee,
 A double plight.

Come, kiss my brow once more,
And call me as before
Thy captured bird :
Thy bird struggling to fly,
Unto thy breast to die,
Cannot be heard.

If I could breathe thy breath,
'Twould take the sting from death ;
Dear heart, too late !
We meet on earth no more ;
I do but go before,
To love and wait.

Oft in my dreams I've seen that fair young face ;
Happy to find in heaven a humble place,
She takes her station at the golden gate,
Where she can watch, and hope and love and wait.

Look at another picture now, — a life
Where sin hath scorched, and waged successful strife :
There came at last a day when Christ was heard,
How hateful seemed each sinful deed and word !

He had not lifted his own hand to slay,
But at his word a life had ebbed away :
And, though not clutched by any human law,
His own soul knew that blood was at his door.

'Twas hard to lift him to his feet again,
Pride and repentance forged a heavy chain :
He chafed to think it could not be undone, —
No earthly crown by him could now be won.

At last he heard that loving voice from heaven,
“ Be comforted, thy sins I have forgiven ;
He who found early death because of thee,
Forgives thee too, his soul is safe with me.”

At midnight once, upon a lonely beach
I wandered, thinking I was out of reach
Of every human voice of joy or woe ;
We clank against the chain where'er we go.

For there and then did break upon my ear
This outcry of the soul so sad to hear :
His voice, once heard, could not forgotten be ;
The waves sobbed on in gentle minor key : —

Thou cruel, mocking Sea,
Hast thou no word of peace for me, I pray ?
Oh, cannot all thy waters wash away
This spot of blood from me ?

Break o'er my guilty head
Ye foaming waves ! perhaps ye may impart
A sense of cleansing mercy to my heart ;
What was it that ye said ?

Ye spake of Him who trod
The Galilean Lake, and stilled its waves,
And called the dead men even from their graves :
But he was Son of God, —

But Son of man as well.
O wilt Thou be my Saviour, come to me,
Tread with Thy precious feet my heart's wild sea,
And with me ever dwell?

That spot of blood remove !
Wear it, dear Lord, upon Thy garments white,
For there alone can I endure the sight,
Speak to me of Thy love.

Fold me in Thine embrace !
Oh ! let me weep upon Thy loving breast,
I know that I shall find a perfect rest,
When I shall see Thy face.

Now listen well, my Benedi&ct, again :
I'll read another story dark with pain.
Hush ! look ! He passes now adown the street ;
You start, — yes, he with those quick nimble feet.

His face was pale, you marked it well, I saw ;
The body wastes each day a little more :
I note the bright, still light in his blue eye, —
The hope by which he lives, in which he'll die.

You do not think his web of fate so sad,
Because his face at times is almost glad ;
But, oh ! what deathless love throbs in that breast,
For her to whom that love is not confessed !

We look upon his chains as forged too well,
That he should break his bonds and leave his cell,
He murmurs, “ God is good, all's possible with Him,
My lamp of faith and hope shall ne'er grow dim.”

He seems to see a light we cannot see ;
So strange it seems, I sometimes question me
If too much grief may not have crazed his brain, —
Tears made a filmy cloud to deaden pain.

The Christ has many ways to heal and bless :
He sees where grief too heavily doth press ;
Then kindles hope, here sometimes to fulfil ;
If not on Earth, in Heaven be sure He will.

I heard him sing these words the other day,
He sang them on his knees. Now, who, I pray,
But the wise Christ could teach to him that song?
Wisdom as well as strength to Him belong.

Weak hearts lie on the sands of Time, and cry,
Undone, undone :
I see no help on earth or sea or sky, —
No comfort, none.

The light upon the rocky isle, once bright,
Has now grown dim ;
So wavers, day by day, and night by night,
My faith in Him.

Strong hearts stand firm upon a rock through hope,
Defying fear :
In blackest night, bethink them of the dawn, —
Help *may* be near.

That ship *may* bear the one I love so well
Back to my heart ;
That wave *may* break the truth at last to tell,
And take my part.

That lightning-flash *may* be no doom of woe,
But break my chain ;
That cloud *may* burst on my parched heart, to flow
In healing rain.

That thunder-bolt, misnamed God's wrath, *may* be
An angel's word ;
That wailing sound, if heard aright, *may* be
The song of bird.

They cast an anchor out like them of old,
And wish for day ;
Knowing the voice that once His followers told,
“ Faint not, but pray.”

And so, through blood and death and tears and war,
You'll hear them say
The cloud *may* lift, the ship *may* reach the shore, —
It *may*, it *may* !

I trust that hope He will on earth fulfil :
If not, he'll bow the head to His high will ;
He will not quench that hope, nor make it dim,
Until his soul is filled with love of Him.

Last week he knelt upon the marble floor,
I had not seen him wrestle so before ;
I feared submission had not rested there,
I thought too agonized, too rash, that prayer.

I laid my hand in check upon his head,
A silence fell, and then at last I said,
“ I have a message from the King to thee,
Now, listen, for the moment, I am He.

With every sigh of thine I groan,
With every tear I bleed ;
Thy griefs are mine more than thine own,
Let us together plead.

Of thy young heart I longed to be
The first love and the best ;
But thou didst turn thy face from me,
And spurn me as thy guest.

With tender love I saw thee hold
Another in thy heart :
Thy speech to me was short and cold,
With thee I had no part.

I said, with or without their will,
My subjects must be mine :
Some love me when their days are ill,
Some, when the sun doth shine.

Thy bark must cross a stormy sea,
I knew, ere thou wouldst rest ;
Failure and grief I knew must be
To drive thee to my breast.

And so, though not in wrath but love,
Thy sun set when it rose ;
I filled thy soul with griefs to prove
That I could heal thy woes.

Thy prison-house is dark, I know,
That house I share with thee :
I listen to thy tale of woe, —
Uplift and strengthen thee.

If one so dear lies near thy heart,
Shall I remembered be?
If from thy bondage thou depart,
Shall I be first with thee?

I thought I heard upon the winding stair,
'Tween Earth and Heaven, an angel at his prayer :
What sweeter song can man or seraph sing
Than this I heard, "Thy will, my King, my King"?

Two years ago, a desperate game I saw
Played out, I never witnessed such before :
'Twas said both lost, and yet I think they won ;
On stranger battle never looked the sun.

She left the young and gay, and threw aside
Her costly robes, and diadems of pride ;
Through prisons and through hospitals now moves,
And by her daily life Christ's power she proves.

Those sick and guilty souls full well she sees,
Knows how to minister to each disease ;
Their outward forms have never met her eyes,
Closed here on earth, to open in the skies.

One day, a dying man, o'er whom she bent,
Murmured, " Dear lady, I'm not quite content :
You know on earth you've never seen my face,
If Christ should give to me in Heaven a place,

You will not know me, — and that makes me sad :
If not for that, I should be very glad ;
Glad that my face on earth you have not seen,
So scarred and spoiled by what my life has been."

She spoke : “ These features marred shall pass away,
'Tis well, dear friend, 'tis merciful we'll say ;
But the fair face which thy repentant heart
And soul shall paint will tell me who thou art.

I shall not fail to know a soldier brave,
Willing to die his native land to save ;
Thy bravery, thy patience in distress,
Thy gratitude, thy penitence no less.

All these will paint a picture I shall know.
Farewell ! 'tis death, I almost see thee go,
Not blind, I see the face thy mother saw, —
Thou kneeling at her feet, long years before.”

She wrote these words the other day to sing,
Within the prison-walls, comfort to bring ;
They thought that Heaven had sent an angel fair
To breathe for them on earth this pleading prayer : —

Draw near, thou Son of Man, abide with me,
Be thou henceforth my home :
I am a weary heavy-laden one,
Whom thou hast told to come.

I come, why should I stay? No rest for me,
Dear Lord, but at thy feet ;
The earthly fruit I plucked hath bitter proved,
I thought would be so sweet.

A poor, mean gift it is to bring to Thee,
This jaded, baffled heart,
That would not see and choose Thee its first love,
All lovely as Thou art.

I chose this world ; I played my game, and lost :
Wilt Thou accept me now ?
Unworthy I to lean upon Thy breast,
Low at thy feet I bow.

Oh, not enough, lift Thou me up ; my heart
Must beat against Thine own ;
Saviour Thou art, Friend, Lover, Thou must be :
I cannot live alone !

My heart is sad, my mind is dark, I must
Feel sure that Thou art near,
Seeing my tears, touched by my grief ; must know
That I to Thee am dear.

How can I doubt? Thy death upon the cross
Hath said that I am Thine ;
For those whom Thou didst die, Thou'lt surely live :
Thy death and life are mine.

Fain would I speak of one I saw but now ;
Large mind, kind heart, both written on the brow ;
But in the subtile sense of sound a flaw,
Pressure from God's own hand, no broken law.

Though brain and soul with melody are filled,
One half the music of the world is stilled,
But only patience, gentleness within,
No bitterness, no murmuring from him.

Is not the patient Christ with him, I pray,
Moulding that gentle spirit day by day ;
Tuning to melody each jarring string,
Hushing the discord which this world would sing?

The child of poverty, with bleeding feet,
Remembers Him who trod the Jewish street,
And smiling, makes the bare cold ground his bed,
Thinking He had not where to lay His head.

The time would fail me, Benediçt, to tell
These miracles of His I know so well,
He wanders up and down this weary world,
His flag of peace and power is never furled.

Thy words have ceased, dear friend, 'tis peace to hear
The music of a voice to me so dear :
How doubly grand the harmony doth swell,
When thou dost speak of Him thou lov'st so well !

Thy tale has well interpreted to me
This tangled world, and its deep mystery :
The question of my soul is answered well,
But there is something now for me to tell.

'Tis left for me to touch the final chord, —
To sing the perfect triumph of the Lord :
The feeblest notes to power and beauty swell,
When for their theme is one loved long and well.

The crowning glory of the Lord I see,
In what He helps His Angelo to be ;
For truer Christian priest than thou, dear friend,
Ne'er walked this earth, nor will until it end.

I've seen thee weary and oppressed with care,
There came a cry for help, no matter where,
Thou didst forget thyself and all thy grief,
If thou couldst minister or bring relief.

How beautiful thy face has grown to be, —
A beauty which shall live eternally !
Beauty the soul carves out in every line,
Making the human portrait seem divine.

I saw thee, Angelo, sustain a shock
Unmoved. The poor, frail ship had struck a rock,
She shivered her own side from stem to stern,
Thy strength and wisdom she had yet to learn.

If on a sand-bank she had gone ashore,
I should have pitied her, and nothing more :
The obstacle so noble must atone,
In my poor judgment, for what she hath done.

Who healed that battered side but thy kind hand?
She sails or anchors now at thy command ;
Keeping in sight the rock that hurt her so, —
Her rock of strength and peace as well as woe.

The great and wise my Angelo revere,
All love thee well, to Benediçt how dear !
All streams, the great and small, to ocean flow,
Thus to the Kings of Earth we all must go.

I am well pleased my Benediçt can see
The traces of my Master's hand in me :
His love and wisdom speak through human lips,
But of that Sun nought here should make eclipse.

Now, Benediçt, I've whispered in your ear
The secret of the world you wished to hear :
Now, go and write, make truth and Him your theme ;
Your books shall seem no more an idle dream.

Tell how the dying year sings at His birth,
At twilight-hour light breaks o'er all the earth ;
At His approach, Peace drowns the voice of war,
Pleading that brothers' blood shall flow no more.

Go, at His birth, and set the captive free,
Sing how He makes all time a jubilee ;
Strike off all fetters from these sons of earth,
Let every heart be filled with holy mirth.

A leaf for healing every month shall fall,
The last must be the best and chief of all :
The month in which the Infant King had birth
Yieldeth the perfect balm for all the earth.



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